

Message Text

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51

ACTION SS-30

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FM USINT CAIRO

TO SECSTATE WASHDC 4116

INFO AMEMBASSY AMMAN

AMEMBASSY BEIRUT

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

USMISSION USUN

S E C R E T CAIRO 3243

EXDIS

EO 11652: GDS

TAGS: MOPS EG IS

SUBJECT: SOVIET VIEW ON CAUSES AND TIMING OF EGYPTIAN
DECISION TO RESUME HOSTILITIES

1. DEPUTY TASS DIRECTOR LEO YEDRASHNIKOV, A SUSPECTED RIS OFFICER, HAS TOLD US THAT SADAT MADE DECISION TO OPEN HOSTILITIES WITH ISRAEL IN EARLY AUGUST. YEDRASHNIKOV SAID SOVIETS HAD VERY CAREFULLY CHECKED THEIR OWN RECORDS TO DETERMINE ACTUAL DATE OF DECISION. HE SAID THAT SOVIET EMBASSY IN CAIRO HAD RECEIVED SOME INDICATIONS IN AUGUST AND SEPTEMBER THAT SADAT WAS PREPARING FOR ANOTHER FIGHT, BUT WERE NOT ABLE TO DRAW THESE TOGETHER INTO COHERENT PICTURE UNTIL THE END OF SEPTEMBER. MOREOVER, SOVIET EMBASSY HAD NOT BELIEVED THAT RESUMPTION OF FIGHTING WAS AT ALL LIKELY.

2. YEDRASHNIKOV SAID THAT, USING 20/20 HINDSIGHT, SOVIETS HAD PUT TOGETHER PICTURE OF WHO HAD BEEN INFORMED OF GOE DECISION TO RESUME WARFARE. HE STATED THAT FEISAL WAS
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INFORMED OF PLAN RELATIVELY EARLY IN THE GAME. SADAT HAD DISCUSSED PLAN WITH HIM DURING HIS VISIT TO JIDDA ON AUGUST 23, AND HAD IN FACT BEEN ENCOURAGED BY SAUDI MONARCH. HUSSEIN WAS GENERALLY AWARE THAT EGYPT WAS PREPARING FOR WAR,

BUT WAS NOT INFORMED OF WHEN IT WOULD OCCUR. HE DISCUSSED DECISION WITH SADAT DURING TRIPARTITE MEETINGS IN CAIRO ON SEPTEMBER 10-12 AND WAS ENJOINED TO SILENCE. HVEDRASHNIKOV SAID THAT HUSSEIN WAS TAKEN BY SURPRISE ON DAY WAR BROKE OUT, SINCE HE BELIEVED IT WOULD TAKE PLACE LATER.

3. WITHIN THE EGYPTIAN GOVERNMENT, SECRET WAS HELD VERY TIGHTLY AMONG SMALL GROUP OF ADVISORS SURROUNDING SADAT. THESE WERE WAR MINISTER AHMED ISMAIL, INTERIOR MINISTER SALEM AND ASU FIRST SECRETARY HAFEZ GHANEM. HEYKAL WAS BROUGHT INTO IT AFTER HE RETURNED TO SADAT'S GRACES AT THE END OF AUGUST. YEDRASHNIKOV SAID THAT HAFEZ ISMAIL WAS OPPOSED TO WAR FROM START; HE WAS STRONGLY PRO-AMERICAN AND BELIEVED THAT POLICY OF RAPPROCHEMENT WITH WEST WAS WORKING IN EGYPT'S FAVOR.

4. ON OCTOBER 5, SADAT HELD FULL CABINET MEETING TO REVEAL THAT ON FOLLOWING DAY EGYPT WOULD GO TO WAR. DURING DISCUSSION WHICH TOOK PLACE, MOST OF THOSE PRESENT APPROVED. VICE-PRESIDENT SHAFEI AND HAFEZ ISMAIL WERE OPPOSED. VICE-PRESIDENT FAWZI CONTRIBUTED LITTLE TO THE DISCUSSION.

5. YEDRASHNIKOV CONCLUDED THAT SOVIETS THEMSELVES WERE NOT AWARE OF DANGER OF SITUATION UNTIL END OF SEPTEMBER, AND DID NOT KNOW DEFINITELY THAT SADAT WAS ABOUT TO RESUME WAR UNTIL OCTOBER 3, WHEN VINOGRADOV SAW SADAT.

6. REGARDING CAUSES OF WAR, YEDRASHNIKOV SAID SOVIETS BELIEVED IT TO HAVE BEEN FORCED ON SADAT BY INTERNAL PRESSURES. AMONG THESE WERE WIDESPREAD RESENTMENT AT SHORTAGES AND PRICE INCREASES OF BASIC FOODSTUFFS, FEARS IN GOE OF CONTINUED STUDENT DISTURBANCES WHEN UNIVERSITIES, AND GENERAL MALAISE ABOUT POLITICAL SITUATION. YEDRASHNIKOV ACKNOWLEDGED THAT THESE REASONS SEEMED INSUBSTANTIAL ALMOST TO THE POINT OF WHIMSY, BUT ADDED THERE SEEMED NO OTHER PROXIMATE CAUSE.

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